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ABSTRACT

Speech communication training is a valuable asset for those entering the public relations (PR) field. This notion is reinforced by the 1987 "Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education," a guide for implementing speech communication courses within a public relations curriculum, and also in the incorporation of oral communication training within public relations courses taught by representative PR educators. "Design" addresses course content that should be covered in a total public relations program, and recommends an "across-the-discipline" approach in which public relations faculty, in cooperation with speech communication faculty, would teach appropriate oral communication skills within the content of their courses. Students might receive additional training in conflict resolution, decision making, and management theory. Currently there exists a public relations Syllabi Bank which contains course syllabi in, for instance, introduction to public relations, cases/problems, public relations presentations, and public opinion/persuasion. Many of these syllabi already contain traditional speech communication curricula. Hence, sufficient evidence exists to support the value of this "across-the-discipline" approach to teaching public relations. (Eight references are included.) (JC)

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HOW SPEECH COMMUNICATION TRAINING INTERFACES
WITH PUBLIC RELATIONS TRAINING

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HOW SPEECH COMMUNICATION TRAINING
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Public relations education, a product of the twentieth century, has evolved into a popular program of study in higher education. It wasn't until 1923 that Edward Bernays, a pioneer in the development of both the public relations profession and the education content for the profession, taught the first public relations course. Since that first course offering at New York University, the public relations discipline has grown dramatically.

Growth of Public Relations Education

In 1948, the Public Relations Society of America was formed. Twenty years later, in 1968, the student organization, Public Relations Student Society of America, was formed. Both organizations have played major roles in the successful growth of the public relations profession and of its education program. PRSA is an affiliate member of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications and participates in ACEJMC's program of accrediting public relations education programs.

In 1973, the first Commission on Public Relations Education was established. This commission, comprised of members from the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and from PRSA, examined the requirements of the professional practice of

public relations in the United States. The Commission then related these requirements to educational standards and developed the landmark 1975 Design for Public Relations Education. Both undergraduate and graduate programs were addressed. (Commission, 1975)

This 1975 Design has now been updated and revised to include a detailed recommended curriculum for graduate education which was published in 1985 and a Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education, published in 1987. This Design addresses the course content that is essential within an accredited public relations curriculum. (Commission, 1987).

There is little doubt that the teaching of public relations is an important part of higher education. By 1985, more than 160 colleges and universities offered either a public relations sequence or a degree program. Neither is there doubt about the growth of the professional practice of public relations. According to the Department of Labor, within the last decade there has been a 24% increase in the number of persons practicing public relations in the United States. (Commission, 1987, p. 1).

Understanding the Public Relations Practice

Although many persons are practicing public relations and many students are studying public relations, few educators outside the PR discipline have a clear understanding of this twentieth century program of study.

Public relations defies a simple definition and the role of a PR practitioner defies a simple explanation.

Essentially, public relations involves the ascertaining and influencing of public opinion through socially responsible and ethical conduct. This public relations process consists of five steps: 1) research, 2) planning, 3) action, 4) communication and 5) evaluation.

The many roles of a public relations practitioner include both technical/production roles and the more advanced strategic planning/managerial roles. Within all of these roles, PR practitioners serve as liaison, interpreter and mediator between an organization and its many publics which may include employees, the community, consumers, stockholders, media, government and regulatory agencies plus other critical audiences. Public relations practitioners are responsible for creating and maintaining a continuous flow of two-way communication, which means removing barriers to effective communication and keeping all lines of communication open.

Skills in preparing press releases and other printed materials have long been recognized as essential to the successful practice of public relations, especially on the technical/production level. However, oral communication skills which must be utilized throughout the entire gamut of a PR practitioner's activities, whether on the technical/production level or on the managerial level, are also essential. The importance of these oral skills dictates that speech communication training should be a significant content element imbedded within the public relations curriculum.

Teaching Public Relations From a Speech Perspective

This paper, therefore, offers suggestions for the integration of speech communication training within the public relations program of study.

The most viable method of interfacing speech communication training with public relations training is to implement an "across the discipline" program. This approach would incorporate oral communication training into public relations courses taught by public relations educators. Various goals would be accomplished.

1. Public relations instructors would stress the career and personal value to the student of being able to speak and listen well in addition to being able to write well.
2. Public relations instructors would make every appropriate effort to integrate oral communication theories and skills into their students' assimilation of the PR course contents.
3. When making and grading assignments, instructors would be guided by the policy of stressing the integration of oral as well as writing skills within the course subject matter.
4. Courses would provide students with significant practice in varied forms of oral communication.
5. Instructors would consider themselves facilitators of student oral communication improvement as well as evaluators of the finished product.
6. Peer group evaluations and group or individual student conferences would be part of the training process.

There is convincing evidence to support this "across the discipline" approach. Numerous speech communication conference presentations and journal articles, including the following ones, have addressed this concept.

Dr. Charles Roberts, in his paper presented at the 1986 Speech Communication Association national convention, describes the highly successful "across the curriculum" approach used by Central College in Pella, Iowa to teach oral communication skills not just in the public relations discipline but rather in all the disciplines within the college. Roberts reported that the success of the oral skills program at Central was evidenced by impressive results. Approximately 75% of the students noticed a significant increase in their skills which they attributed to the across-the-curriculum teaching of speech communication skills. An impressive 92% of the students indicated either a moderate or intense desire to continue bettering their communication skills. Employers of Central's graduates were very pleased by the skills of their new employees, as evidenced by surveys and by a \$150,000 grant for the program. (Roberts, 1986).

Dr. Christopher Spicer presented a short course at the same 1986 SCA national convention in which he provided conceptual and pragmatic bases for teaching public relations for a speech communication perspective. Sample syllabi, lectures, exercises, activities and bibliographies were shared with interested educators. (Spicer, 1986)

Articles appearing in communication journals including Communication Education (Trent and Trent, 1976) and Association for Communication

Administration Bulletin (Measell, 1982) have urged this interfacing of speech communication training with public relations training.

Speech communication educators aren't alone in their support of this "across the discipline" approach. Public relations educators and practitioners have also demonstrated their recognition of this interdisciplinary concept.

The 1987 Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education establishes specific speech communication content which is to be included within a curriculum's public relations professional course offerings. There is also evidence that some public relations educators currently include varying amounts of oral communication training within their public relations courses.

Overview of Design

The 1987 Design (Commission, 1987) was developed by a 26-member commission which included Speech Communication Association and International Communication Association representatives. The earlier 1975 Design had not included these organizations. Sponsors of the 1987 Design were the PR division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the Public Relations Society of America and the Educators Section of PRSA.

Design now becomes the curriculum guide for institutions that have public relations programs accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications and for institutions with PRSSA chapters. In addition, Design serves as a baseline for other institutions

with public relations faculty who may be seeking guidance in public relations program revisions. Therefore, Design is a critical document for PR educators.

Because of the inclusion of speech communication content within the PR program guidelines, it is also an important document for speech communication educators. This speech communication content recommendation marks a significant change from the earlier 1975 Design.

The following overview of this new 33-page document should acquaint speech communication educators with the general thrust of Design, particularly as it relates to speech communication.

Rather than delineating specific course titles, Design addresses course CONTENT which should be covered in a total public relations program. How courses are configured is the prerogative of each educational institution. The commission also takes no stand on what department or school a PR program ought to be located in.

Design emphasizes the necessity of general education and liberal arts courses by stating that 3/4 of the curriculum should be devoted to a study of these disciplines. The remaining 1/4 of the curriculum should be designated as a professionally oriented study of public relations. This study should be divided equally between a study of communication and a study of public relations. The study of communication should address its structure, process and effects. The study of public relations should address its practices at both the technical/production level and at the more advanced strategic, managerial level.

Design states that public relations activity is often carried out through informal, interpersonal networks in the form of face to face discussions and small group meetings. Communication theory, interorganizational theory, conflict resolution theory, decision making and management theories all provide foundations for public relations theory. Interpersonal communication and organizational communication content are recognized as especially important to the study of public relations.

Current Public Relations Course Content

The Public Relations Society of America maintains a public relations Syllabi Bank which was established in 1981 by the Educators Section of PRSA for the use of interested teachers. These syllabi, developed by representative PR educators, indicate course content covered in each course. Syllabi are filed under the following headings.

- introduction to public relations
- public relations
- publicity media and campaigns
- cases/problems
- media relations
- research/surveys
- public relations presentations
- writing for public relations
- publications/editing/graphics
- internships/practicum
- public opinion/persuasion
- Masters programs

A review of selected syllabi from these groupings indicates that some of the leading public relations educators incorporate speech communication training into their public relations courses.

Several syllabi state that course grades are based upon ORAL as well as written contributions. Various syllabi require oral presentations in the forms of informative and persuasive speeches, discussant assignments and/or group problem solving and decision making projects. One syllabus clearly specifies guidelines for oral presentations and provides critique sheets to be used for peer evaluation of these oral presentations. These critique sheets cover the same points as do critique sheets used in speech communication courses. Occasionally, a syllabus will list suggested communication textbooks as references for students wishing additional guidance when preparing oral presentations.

In addition to this "throughout-the-course" integration of oral communication training, there are specific speech-related topics cited in various syllabi. These include, but aren't limited to, the following.

- speakers/bureaus/executive speeches/oral reports
- preparation of radio and television presentations,
including television talk shows
- slides, scripts, speech writing
- gatekeeper interviews/staging press conferences/
art of handling media gatekeepers and placing stories

Syllabi for advanced public relations courses which cover cases, problems and/or campaigns, indicate that students usually spend a significant amount of their time working in a PR agency situation. This involves a cross section of oral learning experiences. Each "agency", comprised of a small group of students, either plans or plans and implements a public relations campaign or project for an actual client. Although not delineated within the syllabi, inherent within the term projects are many communication activities including

client communications, listening, group problem solving, decision making, conflict resolution, group leadership and participation, media contacts and placement of publicity, interpersonal communication in face-to-face situations and mediated communication in situations such as appearing on a television program to promote an upcoming event. Usually these team projects culminate in a final presentation which is delivered orally, as well as in writing, to the client. This presentation may be delivered in a boardroom setting and may be evaluated not only by the client and the course instructor but also by a panel of PR practitioners and/or additional faculty evaluators.

Implications

It is clear that speech communication training can be successfully incorporated into the public relations curriculum. Both speech communication and public relations educators alike have proposed and implemented this approach. Both agree that a linkage between public relations training and speech communication training exists. There may be differences in opinion, however, as to what this linkage is.

The obvious linkage is that speech communication is one of the many elements included within the fourth step - communication - of the five-step practice of public relations. The more important linkage, though, may be the ongoing oral communication activities occurring throughout the total five-step public relations process. The development of these essential oral communication skills should not be left to chance.

Rather, there should be a concerted effort to incorporate this training as an integral part of the public relations curriculum.

Across-the-Discipline Proposal

How, then, can this "across the discipline" approach be developed and implemented?

A first step would be for speech communication faculty to become aware of the public relations curriculum within their institution. Establish a working relationship with the public relations faculty. Ascertain how speech communication faculty can best assist them in their content coverage of oral communication skills. Be aware of Design and its recommendations regarding oral communication training. Prepare a proposal addressing the specific oral competencies needed within the public relations discipline and obtain inter-departmental support of this proposal.

Establish a committee comprised of both public relations and speech communication faculty to be responsible for the planning and guidance of this "across-the-discipline" program. A coordinator of the program, preferably a speech communication faculty person, would develop workshops and newsletters in which there could be a sharing of communication theory, research and methods for improving oral skills within the public relations courses.

Sample syllabi, exercises and assignments which incorporate this oral skills training could be prepared by the committee and shared with

appropriate faculty and administrators. Within the content of each particular syllabus, the oral communication requirements, the means for improving the oral skills competencies and the evaluation criteria would be stated.

In addition to the inclusion of speech training within public relations courses, there should be a clear opportunity for PR students to cross over into the speech communication discipline to enroll in courses. Design, for example, identifies courses in interpersonal communication and in organizational communication as being especially valuable to public relations students. Provide public relations faculty with information explaining the speech communication program and individual courses, stating what each has to offer PR students. The value of either a speech communication double major or a minor should be stressed. Also, the value of a general speech course, as a freshman/sophomore pre-requisite for the PR program, should be stated.

This "across-the-discipline" curriculum approach may be easiest to implement in those institutions housing public relations within a communications school or department. According to a guide to PR academic programs (Kendall, Terhune and Hesse, 1982), some 54 programs are housed in journalism schools or departments. Some 29 are housed in communications schools or departments and an additional 19 are housed in mass communication schools or departments. Two are housed in speech communication departments. Numerous other programs are housed in schools or departments of varying titles but usually incorporating the communications discipline.

The emphasis on speech communication training within the PR courses will probably be greatest within those PR programs housed in communications while those programs housed in a journalism school or department may place greater emphasis on written and graphic communication. However, an "across-the-discipline" approach can be implemented at any institution, irrelevant of the location of the PR program, if both speech communication and public relations faculty recognize the value of such an approach.

Summary

Public relations is a popular program of study within United States colleges and universities. The value of speech communication knowledge and skills is recognized by PR educators and practitioners. This recognition is evidenced in the 1987 Design for Undergraduate Public Relations Education and in the incorporation of oral communication training within public relations courses taught by representative PR educators.

An "across-the-discipline" approach which interfaces speech communication training with public relations training is recommended. Within this concept, PR faculty in cooperation with speech communication faculty, would teach appropriate oral communication skills within the content of their PR courses. There exists sufficient evidence to support the value of this "across-the-discipline" approach.

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